

What is Community?

It's not unusual to think of a community as merely a collection of houses connected by geography. My neighbours and their neighbours, expanding out to a precise, agreed upon boundary that marks its edge. In fact, that's precisely how the Oxford English Dictionary defines community: "a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common." But, of course, community is more than the residents who share a street. Community is more than just having an address between two "welcome" signs on a highway. Community is the result of a unifying spirit that exists between a group of people.

Community means choosing membership. A community is made of the members who have chosen to join it, members who have chosen to become part of what the community stands for and what it represents. You can live next to someone for your whole life, but if you don't get out and meet them, engage with them, then they're not a part of your community, and you're not a part of theirs. The form a community takes and what it stands for reflects its members' unified spirit, work, and the passion they bring to it.

Community is connectedness. More than just the roads and bridges that mark the paths between our homes and businesses, our shared sense of oneness defines community. It shows in the way we greet our new neighbours to welcome their arrival. It shows in the way that we ask after a sick relative when we see them on a chance encounter. Through our connections and connectedness, we help foster and build the bonds that form the foundation of the community.

Community requires work. To grow and to flourish, a community needs to be built. Members of a community host one another at parties, work together for the betterment of all involved, and cheer on one another's kids during sporting events. After you introduce yourself to your neighbour, you need to maintain that connection. Just as we must from time to time touch up the paint on our doors and window frames, the bonds of community must be continually reaffirmed to ensure its ongoing strength and relevance.

Community becomes passion. Whether it's organizing a bottle drive for the local school or cleaning up trash on the side of the road after the snow melts in spring, or offering rides to an elderly member who needs to get to an appointment, community members don't need to be asked

to get involved. They live their connection to their fellow members and believe firmly in the purpose and unifying spirit of the community. Community is its own call to action.

Becoming and being a member of a community is a rewarding experience. Building and maintaining a strong community takes engagement, it takes work, and it takes passion, but the result is greater than the sum of its parts. True community takes the bonds of proximity or shared experience that often drive its creation and turns them into something much more powerful.

Hopefully the next time you drive down a street and think of its community you will be able to imagine how much more is going on behind those well-manicured lawns.